

I Remember

by Em Hashimoto

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I Remember

TITLE: I Remember (1/2)AUTHOR: Em Hashimoto(dragonemi@aol.com)RATING: PG-13, for a word or two and a few slightly improper events.CATEGORY: SRAKEYWORDS: Mulder/Scully married.SUMMARY: A young woman reflects upon her life and family at Christmas. DISCLAIMER: Dana Scully and Fox Mulder aren't mine. They are trademarks of the big kahunas over there at 1013 Productions.Sorry to The Knack and Lisa Loeb for my use of their songs, "My Sharona" and "Stay," respectively. Sorry to Ben Folds Five for borrowing "Brick." They were all used without permission.Shannon Mulder, Samuel Mulder, and the Peterman's, however, belongs to me. Bwaaahahahaha.FEEDBACK: FEED ME!!!! I love feedback! E-mail me at dragonemi@aol.comARCHIVE: Tell me where and thus shall receive. And keep my name on it.CONTENT WARNING: This is way important. This story involves abortion. If you have a problem with that, *definitely* bail now.AUTHORS NOTE: This is my second fanfic, and my first one alone. So if it seems like it's not flowing or whatever, I apologize. This was also fun to write. And thanx to anyone who writes MSM, cause that's my inspiration.OOH! I also want to thank Tammy Parnell, who co-wrote with me on my first fanfic. She really helped me, and is a great writer. Thanx, Tammy.

I Remember (1/2)by Em Hashimoto

*****Christmas, 2017*****

My family is weird.

Everyone's family is a little weird, I decide in my mind. But my family is really weird. And as I drive home for Thanksgiving from Boston, this is what I'm thinking about. It's becoming pitch black and traffic has died down. I can't believe I'm going home for Christmas. I swore I'd never go back unless I was forced. Okay, so I never swore such a thing. Sue me.

It's not like I don't love my parents. I love them very much, in fact. But in terms of my entire family -- It's too much to handle.

However, when Grandma called and told me to get down here for the holidays; well, I can never say no to my grandmother. Grandma is so much fun. She takes me shopping and buys me whatever I want (For instance, I found this to-die-for khaki dress and jacket; something like Mom once had. Grandma got teary eyed, then handed the salesperson her Visa with a smile). Last month, she came up to school for the weekend, and we had a wonderful time, just talking and showing her around the city.

I had actually spent the Jewish holidays with my boyfriend, Joshua Peterman, and his family. But the Hanukkah season was over, and there was nothing left to do. Midterms were over; we had been on break for a couple of weeks.

So I obliged.

And that's how I ended up on this dark highway, heading to Georgetown, where my parents live.

Did I mention I love my car? My dad bought it for me as a graduation present. It's this adorable red compact, and it fits me perfectly. I remember Dad teasing me that I wouldn't pass my driving test and then he'd have to drive me everywhere. I said, 'Yeah, right,' and passed it, kicking some major ass.

All my bags are thrown in the back, tossed in rage and pissed off-ness. The best part? I wasn't upset. I just felt like throwing something. God, I hope nothing broke. I have this gorgeous vase I got for my mother when I went to Venice. I hope it didn't break.

Damn that driver! They just cut in front of me! Bastard, I mutter silently. I honk loudly. Mom's always telling me I'm a worse driver than my dad. Yeah, right. This coming from parents who cut through fields in their station wagon (stowing me) in the middle of the night.

This car ride is going faster than I expected. It usually takes me awhile, even when I'm speeding above the limit. But another hour, and I'll be at home.

Home. I contemplate this every once in awhile. I know I sound like I had an unhappy childhood. But in reality, it was a very good childhood. I lived on a playmate infested street. I had a dog named Eddie (I still love watching Frasier on Nick At Nite), and the occasional goldfish. I spent summers in Rhode Island. I have the greatest parents, I really do. They are dedicated, and just, as my boyfriend's mother would say, good people. But my life somehow feels empty.

I put on the radio. I've forgotten how blessed a long quiet car ride is. Josh is usually next to me, pumping me with how Nietzsche is so gauche, and Freud probably had stereotypical psycho behavior. I switch stations. Since I usually do the driving everywhere, Josh's station is always talk radio so he can argue with what people have to say.

I have nothing against NPR. But NPR wasn't what I wanted right now. I switched to something better. Oooh! My mind screams. I love The Knack!

The lyrics float through the car. "M M M My Sharona-Whooo! M M M My Sharona!"

Okay, I change my mind. I can't take it anymore. I switch it off and find something better.

"And you said that I was naive and I thought I was strong oh I thought hey I can leave I can leave oh but now that I was wrong...."

Right now, this song is not very appealing. Most likely because I'm singing along. I can't carry a tune, but it's not my fault. It's in my genetic makeup.

"You say I only hear what I want to..."

I pull into the driveway at about midnight. I can see the shadow in the window. I can't believe my mother still wait up for me! I'm 19 years old, and she still waits to make sure I'm safe. Jesus... I mean I am an adult.

I open the back door and pull out my bag and shopping bags of presents. I look at the big maple in the front yard, with the swing my mom and I put up when I was five.

I climb up the steps, stopping to run my fingers along the cement that holds my three-year-old hand prints.

The door opens when I stand up straight. It reveals my mother.

I remember coming home from the senior prom at six in the morning. I expected Mom to kill me, since she told me to be home at two, but instead she smiled and told me tell her what I did all night.

Well of course... after that I was grounded. But I went asleep an hour later thinking that I wouldn't, and that was okay.

She looks me over and ushers me inside. Mom takes my bags and puts them at the bottom of the stairs. Then she opens her arms and I fall into them. "Hi, sweetie." I fall into the comforting presence of my mother. She has always been this way. No matter what, after she's done being pissed with me, she always forgives me.

Mom pulls me into the kitchen. "Knowing you, you haven't eaten a thing since you left Boston, so I made you some pasta. You didn't eat, right?" I nod. She turns around, pleased that she's predicted me.

"So what have you been up to?" Mom is always asking me this when she sees me. We talk once a week and she still asks me this question. But now I will humor her.

"Good. Exams were a bitch--, um, a pain in the butt, but I think I survived. My psychology test killed me, though."

Mom looks thoughtful. "I thought maybe you'd be like Daddy in that respect." I look up at her. "Where *is* Dad?"

She smiles. "He's upstairs. He's probably already asleep."

This remark is funny. Daddy, to the best of my recollection, spent most of my life getting a few hours sleep in a night, sitting up reading or dozing in front of the TV. But my pasta is ready so I say nothing.

"Good?"

Mom's voice startles me from my thoughts. "Yeah. Thanks."

She smiles at me. "Sure, sweetie. I'm going to bed. Get some rest, Shannie."

Mom goes up the stairs, and from out of nowhere pops my little brother, babbling at me incoherently. "Shannie, Shannie, Shannie! Guess what? In preschool I learned how to read, and I just read Moby Dick!"

Samuel Mulder is my brother, an unexpected surprise delivered to my parents (their second miracle, they referred to him as; I never understand what the first was) and I three years ago. At first, I couldn't be farther away from him, but now, I can't seem to get enough of his enthusiasm and energy. He is so funny. He never sleeps, and I don't know how he has so much energy, but he does, and he flung himself at me.

I scooped him up into my lap, and gave him a kiss on the forehead. "Sammy, that's great. Have you been good lately?" I questioned.

"No, but then again, he takes after his old dad," a voice says, its body attached coming into view. My dad's tall frame loomed above us all of a sudden. Daddy leans down to kiss my head, and pulled Sam into his arms. "Let me put Herman Melville into bed, and then we'll talk."

I nod and Dad goes upstairs. I can hear Sammy trying to talk Dad out of bedtime. I finish my late dinner, then clean up a little bit. I wander into the living room, sitting down on the couch and looking around. Keepsakes of three lives, then eventually one more, but it's amazing how out of touch I feel with this place that held me capture for eighteen years.

A recent picture that Sam drew of his family was framed and obviously a work of art. From what I could tell, I saw two women, both with red hair. A really giant person slightly resembling Dad. A frog, which I happen to know Sam calls Shannie. Lovely.

There is a picture I have never seen on the wall. I get up to look at it. It's a plain frame, and the picture is a little snapshot. Mom and Dad are reading a newspaper together, both are wearing FBI jackets. I'm curious as to who took this picture.... maybe Uncle Frohike.

Dad comes downstairs. "My son... what an odd child. He told me he'd give me a million dollars if I didn't make him go to bed."

I smile as Dad sits down next to me. "And?"

"I told him to make the check out to Fox Mulder, but then he was asleep."

"Oh," I reply lightly. I want to tell him about Josh. And everything else that's been going on. He needs to know. "Daddy..."

"Yes?" His eyes are gentle. He's never pried into my life, my father. A respectful distance has always been between us, and somehow this angers me. Mom was always big about it. She gave me curfews, checked out every single guy I dated, and all those other things overprotective parents do. I wish, on occasion, that I had two parents who were like that.

Not saying Daddy isn't protective. Only more in a "No-you-can't-go-out-the-government's-gonna-get-you" way.

But I decide to tell him anyway. "Dad," I begin again, confident, but not sure how to continue. He's curious, but says nothing.

"Um, I've--"

"Fox!" My mother dashes down the stairs. "Shannon. I didn't know you were still up, sweetie. You should get some rest. Sam's expecting you to take him sledding tomorrow."

I fake a yawn and stretch. "You're right, mom. G'night Dad. 'Night, Mom." I give them both a hug and a kiss, lingering as if it is the last time.

I slowly ascend up the stairs that are above the couch. I sit on the steps for a minute watching them. They whisper to each other, heads bent towards each other in a conspiratorial way. As if they were the only two people on the planet.

I can remember ever since I was little watching them do that. They always seemed so much in love. So while all my friends parents were divorcing, my parents stayed together. I wish I knew their secret.

I climb the rest of the way up the stairs, marveling at all the pictures on the wall. Upon entering my room, I'm shocked to see it's the same. I've been at college a while, but nothing has been changed.

My plain white bedspread stares up at me, a slight pink stain still visible from the first time... never mind. I still blush, thinking of that night. Dante Adams was rightly named; that boy whispered love to me that still haunts me when Josh is not around to try to seduce me out of my thoughts.

My computer sits there collecting dust, because when I was old enough, Mom bought me a laptop. Believe me, I learned how to do illegal things that would make my parents -- well, at least would make Daddy proud.

Otherwise, my room is pretty much plain. I have an armoire from Mom's old apartment in the corner painted with peace symbols and doves, a

holdover from when I was convinced I was a hippie, with a TV/VCR and stereo system stowed inside. A treadmill, so I could run off steam whenever necessary, because if I remember correctly, during high school, I did that a lot.

And, of course the poster Daddy gave me last Christmas.

'I Want To Believe,' it declares. I remember getting it, and being completely confused. Believe what? I mean I know there are aliens on it or something. But... I don't know. Mom and Dad really thought it was funny.

I suddenly felt nauseous, so I laid down in the bed, putting my flushed cheek to the cool pillow.

I changed positions so I was staring at the ceiling. Since the lights were off, my glow in the dark plastic constellations were visible. That was during my phase when I saw that old movie, Contact. What a powerful movie. I remember Mom rented it because she thought Matthew McCauneghy was cute. And also, she knew it dealt with faith, and she's always struggled with hers...

God, I wish Josh were here. I'm hurting now, and he always knows how to make it stop. I pull off my jeans and sweater, and put on my jogging pants and sweatshirt.

Then I slip inside the covers with 'a DMV-sized headache', like Mom used to say.

I wish Josh were here. Then maybe I could tell Dad what I have to tell him, because Josh always makes me brave.

I descend the stairs as my lungs start to fill with smoke. I become alarmed, until I realize that Mom has been cooking. I know I shouldn't say it, but it's true. Mom just can't cook.

Oh, shit. Now the smoke detectors are going off. That means one thing...

"AAAAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHHHHH!!!!!!!!!!!!!!"

The scream is coming from Sam's room. He has this terrible fear of fire, and the smoke detector scares the shit out of that kid. Mom's busy trying to shut it off, so I run upstairs to Sammy's room. He's sitting upright in bed, crying. "Ahhhh!! Fire!!!! FIRE!!!!!!"

I sit on his bed and grab him into a huge hug. His cries slowly dissipate.

"See, Sammy? The smoke detectors are off. No fire, okay?"

He gives me a big smile. "I know that, Shannie." Then he hops off the bed yelling about whatever the hell three-year-olds scream about... but no more fire.

I sit on Sammy's bed for a little longer. The feel of a child in my arms. I sit and begin to cry. "Shannie??? It's for you... who is *Josh*??"

Dad's voice booms upstairs, and he sounds, oh, I don't know. Pissed, maybe? Just slightly over-angered? I'm not quite sure which. "Thanks," I shout back, "I got it!" I pick up the extension in my room, and wait until I hear the click on Dad's end.

"Josh? Love, I thought we agreed to take sometime off."

His comforting voice shoots through the phone. "I know, Shannon, but I missed you so much. Hey, your dad's nice."

My heart aches.

"Josh? I miss you, too, but this isn't a good time."

"Why the hell not?" He pauses, quickly analyzing my voice. "You didn't tell your parents about us, did you," he tells me, sighing into the phone.

"Joshie, sweetie--"

"Don't call me that! Why didn't you tell them?" Josh barks. I sigh. He's so goddamn frustrating. He thinks we're not fornicating if we have my parents blessing.

"They have this fantasy that their daughter is pure and sweet... If I tell them--"

He cuts me off, "You're not so pure anymore. I understand, honey, but still--"

"Will it make you feel better if I tell them?"

He sighs. "Extremely."

I ponder this silently. "Then I will. I'll tell them tonight--"

"Shannon Mulder! You'll march your gorgeous body downstairs right now and tell them!"

"You know I like a man who gives orders." I crack, even though I'm blushing terribly, a curse of pale inherited skin.

I can tell he feels better. "So can I come down?"

"Don't push your luck," I stutter through my laughter.

He ignores me and lowers his voice. "How's... um... everything else?"

I swallow back words that I should say, and tell him, "I'm fine, Josh."

"Uh-huh." I know he doesn't believe me. Hell, I don't believe myself. I can hear voices in the background. "My parents are here. They send their love, Shan."

"Send mine back."

"Okay. Bye. I love you."

Making sure no one's around, I answer him. "Bye. Love you, too."

We hang up and I sigh. Now I have to go explain a *lot* to my parents.

I jog slowly down the stairs. I really don't want to talk to them about them about my 'secret' boyfriend.

"Mom?" I ask tentatively.

My family is sitting around the kitchen table. Mom looks up at me.

"I have to talk to you. And Dad." Wow. This is very hard. They both have my attention. So does Sammy. I sit down and indicate this.

"Sammy, I think that Power Dude is on now, " my mother says, giving me a curious look.

"You don't have to get rid of me. I get it." He climbed down from his chair, and ran to the rec room. My parents look at me expectantly. My throat is dry.

"Uh, the guy who called, his name is Josh..."

Mom and Dad are like, Uh-huh, continue. "He's my boyfriend--"

"Are you using protection?" my mother blurts out, rather loudly. Dad starts laughing, until he realizes that we're both serious.

"Yes," I squeak out "but--"

That's when my parents basically placid expressions became frightened. "Oh, God. You're not pregnant, are you?" Mom quickly spits out.

I give a weary smile. "No, but I was. I... I had an abortion. And, and I'm sorry. I know I wasn't supposed to. I know it's against everything that is supposed in nature, and in my religion, but it was my choice. I'm so sorry. Josh and I just thought that we weren't ready to be parents and--"

My father closes his eyes briefly; seconds later they pop wide open. My mother's frozen look becomes colder, as she stares at him, their eyes conducting a conversation on how to deal with their unruly daughter.

But then they both do something I never expected. Mom came to my chair, and pulled me into her arms. That's when I began crying. I haven't cried since this whole thing began. But now, I sob. And relax in my mother's arms, a feeling that comforts me and brings me back to my childhood, when my mother's arms could fix any problem.

"Shh, sweetheart, shh. It's okay honey," Mom tries to reassure me. Daddy sits in his chair, staring at me expectantly. He's very still.

Then he gets up and goes upstairs.

I pull my face from my mom's shoulder long enough to say, "Where's he going?"

She looked up the stairs, and shrugged. "I'll go see. And honey, you should have told us. But we're not upset." Mom stands, and pats my shoulder. "We have a lot to talk about, though."

She goes upstairs. I can hear yelling, screaming, and a slamming door. That's pretty familiar. My parents don't fight like that often, but when they do, nothing is held back. Half an hour lapsed, then I hear an unfamiliar noise. A slap. Then my mother's uncontrollable sobs. That just doesn't happen. My mother doesn't cry. Thank God Sammy can't hear from the rec room.

I run upstairs to see my mother slumped against a wall. I was afraid that my father had finally gotten angry enough to hurt her. I lean over her and mutter, "Are you okay?" She sits up and tries to smile. "Yeah, but go check on you father. I don't know how okay he is." I look my mom over. She's okay, from what I can see."

From the hallway, I can see Daddy's outline standing in the doorway of their bedroom. I approach him, and I can see his left eye is black and purple. I put my fingers on his eye, and he quickly ducks my touch. He carefully looks around me at my mother, and surmises she's okay.

"I'm sorry," I say simply. Daddy nods, and pulls me into his arms. I let out a silent sob, and he pulls me closer. He's slowly adjusting to the shock, I realize. I must have shocked the crap out of him.

Daddy quickly moves to Mom, and leans over her. "Dana? Dana? I'm so sorry. I don't know what came over me. God, I'm so sorry--"

She sits up slowly, and wraps her arms around his neck. They sit like this, so I go downstairs. I don't know what happened upstairs, and I never will. In fact, I don't really want to know. There are just some things that children and adults must keep private.

After our horrible morning, I took Sam sledding as promised. He nearly killed me with all of his exuberance. He went plowing down that hill, like, a million times. And in to me about fifty times. Mom and Sammy just went to mass, and they managed to cajole Daddy into going. I managed to plead exhaustion, and stayed home. For some reason, I'm just not in the religious frame of mind.

I settle in the living room with a comforter, wrapped snugly around me. I am not comforted. My thought are with Josh. God, I miss him. And I do want to be with him, but right now, I don't think it's a good idea for him to meet my family.

Damnit. Just as I'm getting comfy, the damn phone rings.

I pick it up.

"Hello?"

"Hey, hon! Guess where I am?"

I feel confused. "Who is this??"

"Shannie! It's me!"

I sigh with relief. "Josh." My curiosity gets the better of me.

"Where are you?"

"I'm in the car. Guess where I am?"

I sigh again, this time with anger. "On the phone. Headed towards Georgetown?"

"You are correct. And you win -- me! I'll be there soon."

I can feel my blood boiling slowly. "Joshua Peterman! The only words I've been saying to you is that I want to be alone! Get it through your thick skull!"

"Babe, I just pulled off the highway. I'll be there soon. Bye!"

I decide this isn't as bad as it seems. But when my parents get home, shit is so gonna fall. I crawl back into my nest of blankets. I don't know how I'm gonna deal with this, but I will.

I guess I fell asleep, because I awoke to the sound of the doorbell.

I spring up and run to the door. I fling the door open, and Josh stands there with this duffel bag and two bags filled with presents.

"I cannot believe you," I mutter. Then I throw my arms around his neck and don't let go.

Finally, he pries my arms off of him and drops his bags inside. He shuts the door and pulls me with him.

"It took me a while to find it. Gorgeous house. It has personality. I love it," he analyzes. He goes to the tree, and pulls out presents.

He looks up at me and says, "Some are from my parents. They went to Toys "R" Us this morning to get this for Sam. Oh, and some are Hanukkah presents for everyone. Late, but not like they care."

"You are amazing," I can't help but say.

He grins. "I know."

That's when he pulls out a small box and hands it to me. "After this, you're gonna make a statue to me."

I sit down and pull off the wrapping. It's a blue box with white ribbon. And that's when my breathing starts coming a little heavier.

"I made a little detour in New York," he interrupts my thoughts.

I gasp when I pull out a gorgeous engagement ring. "Mom and Dad told me this would make a nice Christmas gift. Since I never celebrated Christmas in my life, I took their word for it--"

"Yes," I pull him into an embrace.

"Wait, will you? I didn't even get to propose."

I grin. "Complain, complain. Am I gonna have to put up with this forever?"

Josh smiles. "Shannon, I love you."

"I know," I say, using my favorite Star Wars line.

"Love, knock off the Star Wars. Please? It's cute when you wear the Princess-Lea-Gold-Bikini, but this is not the time." I smile. And I smile a huge real smile, the smile you give just for you, just for being alive.

That's when my parents walk in the door with Sammy asleep in Dad's arms.

Oh, crap.

It's now after one. Daddy went upstairs to put Sammy to bed. As I hadn't predicted or expected, Mom and Dad love Josh. So does Sammy, especially because Josh gave him the new Power Dude video game (He wriggled around so much Josh let him open a present).

Mom's making coffee. That was her excuse so she could leave us alone. Mother Radar, possibly. I think her parental skills have become more in tune with years, and that's a good thing. I remember when she would never leave my dates alone when I was thirteen... maybe with good reason.

Josh is sitting next to me. What we haven't told them yet is about our engagement. It's way too much, too fast for my parents to take.

"So," Josh says, with a grin. "This is your weird family? Shannon, they're so great." I roll my eyes, as tired as they are. "Yeah, but you didn't grow up with my parents."

He shook his head. "Nope, I didn't. I was raised by those nutcases in New York."

The nutcases in question are his parents. They own this huge Kosher deli in New York, and that makes them pretty well-to-do. Also, Linda and Marc Peterman are wonderful, caring people who can be a tad neurotic sometimes, but are still passionate and just fabulous. Linda's overbearing, but in a good way, and Marc just counters her. They make a great team. But they're not nut cases; not by a long shot.

"So, tomorrow, are you up to meeting everyone?" I ask, hopeful that he'll say no.

"Mais oui, darling. In fact, that's why I came. I think we should tell your whole family tomorrow."

"Shut up, Josh! Mom can hear you," I whisper fiercely.

"So can I call her Mom, starting now?" he asks, grinning. Josh ducks the pillow I throw at his head just in time. He's so... well I don't know! Just... too cute.

I'm ashamed of myself. Even though I am nineteen, I have no control. At seven this morning, me and Sammy went running down the stairs towards the Christmas tree.

Of course, when I realized I left my secret fiancée upstairs, I ran to go get him. He, of course, ran smack into me.

"Ouch," I say, then grin uncontrollably. This has been a little bit of hell, these past few days, but I'm getting used to hell. It suits me.

"I never understood why you guys ran to the tree," he mused, nodding to my brother. "I think I understand why."

From the stairwell, I can hear the quick rip of paper, then a squeal. "Shannie! This is exactly what I wanted!"

Josh grabs my elbow as we headed for the living room. "What did you give him?"

I grin. "A quantum physics book. Used it last year."

"Does he understand it?"

I shrug. "Does anyone?"

We sit down by the tree as Josh shows Sam how to work the laptop he bought for him. I look around, thinking of so many Christmases I've spent here. And then again, some not so happy Christmas times. One time Mom and Dad were fighting, and Mom smashed something Daddy gave her. She threw it at the wall missing his head. That wasn't a very happy Christmas, needless to say.

But I remember the Christmas when I was ten. I really wanted a puppy. So I got Eddie. He jumped out of the box and licked my face. But it was so sad. Last semester, I got a call from Dad saying that Eddie died in his sleep. He was old, but it still broke my heart. I skipped classes for four days I was so upset; I was an utter basket case.

"I see you started without us." Daddy's voice comes down the stairs as he and Mom come into the living room.

"Merry Christmas, sweetheart," Mom whispers, as she gives me a kiss on my head. She sits next to Sammy and helps him unwrap something.

I feel content, but this won't last. Josh hasn't met the rest of my

family yet.

End (1/2)

I Remember (2/2)by Em Hashimoto Josh decided that he needed something, so he grabbed a car seat and took Sammy with him to do an errand. He promised to be at Grandma's by two. Yeah, right. He's about as punctual as a broken clock.

Mom and Dad just left, because Mom wanted to help Grandma with something. Some crock pot emergency.

I pull on my new coat and winter accessories. Gloves, scarf, and hat. But not like I'll need it; I look cute in my winter accessories. I lock the door, and head out to my car. As I climb into the car, I have this awful feeling Mom is talking to everyone, telling about her sinful offspring.

Suddenly, I hear a ringing noise, shocking me out of my delusions. I forgot my cell phone was in the car. I pick it up slowly. "Hello?"

"Hey, cutie! How are you doing? You coming over to Maggie's?"

"Aunt Sam! Hi! Yeah, I'll be there soon." Aunt Sam is really a lot of fun. She was missing for a while, but now she's back and is so crazy. She's kinda old, but she roller blades and snow boards and does weird stuff like going sky diving. In other words, she's enchanting.

"Great, great. I just wanted to see where you were. See you soon, sweetheart. Merry Christmas!" She hung up before I could give her an answer.

I sped towards Grandma's. Forever, I have loved going there. First of all, she spoiled me, as most grandmothers do. And she always listened to me. She always understood. Besides Grandma, I love her house. She has a huge house, with big comfy rooms and big windows. I remember when I was a little kid, I used to think that it was a castle and I was a princess.

I pull into the driveway, climb out holding three bags, filled with presents. I feel like freaking Santa Clause. I carefully set down one bag to ring the doorbell, but Aunt Tara flung the door open, squealing. Great. She's in excited mode. Heaven help me....

Let me explain. Aunt Tara is married to Uncle Bill. She's this perky blonde whose constant exuberance is slightly nauseating. But I love her anyway.

"Hi," I mumble weakly. She grabs me in her arms, and does her usual thing where she hugs me too tight, then pulls me away to get a good look at me. I scramble out of her arms, and duck her kisses. I walk into the main hallway. It's decorated with greens, garlands, and all that Christmas stuff.

Then three more relatives descend upon me. "Ooh! Sweetie, you look

great. Have you lost weight?" Aunt Ally cooed.

Aunt Ally grins at me before ushering Uncle Charlie in to see me. They both hug me, and then, with a wicked gleam in her eye, my aunt whispered to her husband and they both dashed off to a bedroom. Their daughter, Dana (named after the aunt who delivered her, don't ask) shrieked and crushed me with a big hug. She's a few years older, but she's one of my favorite cousins. Their whole branch of the Scully family is... excitable, to say the least. Much more so than *my* somber family.

Uncle Bill suddenly descends on me, giving me a big hug, which is unusual. Sometimes, he's not that bad. And he even seems cool sometimes. Okay, so maybe Uncle Bill isn't that cool. In fact, he's boring, and at every family gathering, Uncle Bill and Dad usually get into a fight. I take that back. Uncle Bill isn't boring. He's just a jerk. "Hey, kiddo. School okay?"

I nod. "Good!" he says. "You seen Matt and Faith and Ashley?" I haven't. Matthew is about two years older than me. He's in med school, and he's gonna make a good surgeon some day. However, I wouldn't let him operate on me because of the exuberance he inherited from his mother. He also has a fiance named Faith, and she has a little girl named Ashley. Quite the family scandal, but I like scandals. Hell, I created my own.

All these family members are rushing at me! But I finally can just sit down. Then the doorbell rings, and I hear a pert, "Honey? Can y'get that?" from Aunt Tara. So I get up, and open the door. It's Sam and Josh. Josh leans over Sam to kiss me chastely, without even stepping inside. "Hey," he whispers.

Sam, as usual, runs into the house, and within a few seconds, I hear an 'OW!' Sam often just barrels into people, and injures them. What can I say? The kid is a Mulder.

Josh drapes one arm around my shoulder protectively. "So, where is everyone?" he murmurs quietly. I begin to giggle. And I *don't* giggle. "You just missed the attack twenty minutes ago. Let's look."

He gently ushers me inside. We go to the den, where Uncle David is watching football with Dad. Uncle David is my Aunt Sam's husband. He's pretty cool. Like, I remember when I was a kid, he would talk to me like an adult, unlike Uncle Bill. He'd talk about politics and government and the world. As I grew up, our conversations enhanced and now we talk about other things. But one thing we still talk about: sports. I have to admit, it's fun to argue Celtics and Knicks with him.

I don't know when both my families started coming here. I think it's because on Dad's side of the family, it's just Aunt Sam, Uncle David, their kids, and Grandmother Mulder. Oh, and us. And I think Daddy wouldn't go up to visit, (He doesn't like his mother very much) so they started coming down here... I guess after Aunt Sam came back. That was when I was really little.

After Uncle David gave me a big hug, he sits back down and eyes Josh. "So," he says. "I hear you're the one whose corrupting my niece." I can hear Dad's choking laughter, trying to be muffled.

Josh rose to the occasion. I'm glad he took that speech class last semester... "No, she's corrupted herself quite nicely, sir. I just was a pawn in that operation." With one simple statement, he had won Uncle David's trust as mu uncle chuckled. "Son, you like football?" Josh looks at me, and nodded. "Well, sit down. You expect to enjoy a game standing up? Mulder, move your ass over for Josh." He sits down, and Uncle David's doing a play-by-play of what already happened. I manage to escape, but then Grandmother heads me off in the dining room, en route to the family room.

"Honey," she whispers, as she tucks me into a hug. "Hi," I whisper back. She pulls me away, and looks at me square in the eye. "Is he here? I want to meet him."

"Grandmother, please don't start anything. Josh and I, we're in this together, so please, don't blame him." Grandmother glanced at me blankly. "I don't. I want to meet my future grandson-in-law, or whatever the hell he'll be." She heads off quickly. I shake my head in frustration. My grandmother.....

I go upstairs, and glance into Grandma's bedroom. I see Mom looking at a picture. She's crying. I want to know why, but I refuse to push her. From the doorway, I see her clutching a picture of Aunt Melissa. I tiptoe away from the door. This explains everything.

My Aunt Missy died before I was born. She was my mom's older sister. I wish I had met her. She seems so cool. Another relative who died was Grandpa Bill. He died before I was born. From pictures and stories, he seemed like he would've been a really great grandpa. He looks friendly in pictures, and he looks happy a lot. Mom calls him Ahab; she misses him a lot. And Mom always says that she misses them both most during the holidays.

I head down into Grandma's guest room, where I would sleep when I slept over her house. I remember so many comforting memories.....

"Shannon! Climb into bed! It's almost after nine!" Grandma's voice shouts from downstairs. She comes up the stairs with an old book. I'm sitting on my bed, looking intently at the book in her arms. She sits down on the bed next to me.

"This was your mother's. I suppose she doesn't know I have it. It's called Moby Dick. Have you ever heard of it?" I shake my head, no.

"Really? I was sure Mommy would've read it to you... anyway, it's about a captain named Ahab who's searching for a whale. Would you like to read it?"

"It sounds scary, Grandma."

She smiles at me. "No, not really. It might seem scary, but you're your mother's daughter, and *nothing* scares her...." I run my hand over the bedspread. I don't think I understood that statement until now. "Shannon? Where have you been?" Seeing my cousin, a smile spreads on my face.

I get up to wrap my arms around Kelly. It's pretty hard, considering

her humungous beach ball-tummy holding a little baby. She's twenty-three. Kelly has the sweetest disposition, and she's my favorite cousin (She's a med student, but unlike Matt, I would let her operate on me). My cousin got married last year to a fellow med student, and when they dropped in on me, I discovered he was extremely cute. Almost like the doctors on that show... um... damn. What was the name... ER? Or something.

"I heard," she said softly. "I'm so sorry, Shan. A baby is such a great responsibility, and I'm glad you're going to wait until later."

I smile at her diplomacy. She's pro-choice, but cannot stand to see anyone in pain. "Thanks, Kel... hey, where's Sean?" Sean's the hugest pain in the world. I love him, of course, but really, he's a brat. I just cannot believe he and Kelly are related. He turned twenty-five this summer. He's becoming a lawyer, and you know about *that.*

She rolled her eyes and snorted. "Probably talking about ways to overthrow the world with Saddam Hussein. Where else?"

I begin to laugh. It feels good. I remember the first time I met Kelly. She was about 11, and I was 7. We hit it off right away. Sean, however, did not join in our bonding. He did boy stuff, like throwing dirtbombs, and things I deemed unexceptable.

"Shannon?" Mom's voice shouts from somewhere.

"In here!" I call back. She runs into the room, and smiles. "Hon, you're huge!" She wraps Kelly in a big hug, and pulls away. Mom looks sadly at her stomach to me. I know what she's thinking, because I'm thinking the same thing. Mom smiles forlornly at me.

"Sweetie, Josh has been looking for you. And it's almost time to eat." She turns and leaves.

Kelly stares at me. "Is Josh--"

"Yes."

She nods and whispers, "Oh." Kelly gets up, and gives me a lopsided smile. "I'd race you to the table like we used to, but I'm pretty sure you'd beat the crap out of me."

I grin and get up. "Maybe." We walk out together.

Dinner time. Always a noisy affair at Grandma's, but tonight, the noise level was considerable. I drift off, looking at all of these people. Aunt Missy and Grandpa are missing, which is so unfair.

Josh fits in perfectly to this whole family thing. I, however, do not. I never have. I'm not quite sure I'm some kind of weird loner, but I like to be alone, thinking, not answering questions about when I'm going to get married. Josh is fielding those questions, and everyone is chuckling, so I put a smile on my face. I excuse myself quickly, and head off outside to the treehouse in the backyard. I couldn't have been there for ten minutes when Mom came up. "Hey,

sweetie. What's up?" she calls to me, going up the ladder.

I look away. "Nothing. But Mom, I want to be alone."

She's standing above me. "No, I'm not going anywhere until you tell me what's going on. My baby girl is upset, and she won't talk to anyone. So I choose. You'll talk to me. Now." Mom has this tone in her voice. The one she usually uses on Dad.

I shrug. "Sit then, cause this is complicated."

She sits, and I sigh. "I got the abortion. I was okay... sort of. It was physically okay. I was pretty much in good shape. But emotionally... Mom, I was so scared. I still am, a little."

Mom stares at me. "Why?"

"I committed murder. First degree, premeditated, murder."

She stares at me intently, urging me silently to continue. "I wasn't scared of being arrested or anything. But, Mom, I killed my child. Something innocent and wonderful was killed. I... I... said to someone, 'Kill my baby, because I made a mistake.'"

"And I made a stupid mistake. I didn't even carry the baby to term and give it up for adoption. I just ran scared to the abortion clinic. Oh, my God, I was so irresponsible..."

By this time, I'm crying, wiping my tears away with my sleeve. Mom carefully folds me into her arms. "If you carried the baby to term, sweetheart, you would've not been able to let go. I can tell you, you would've cried and cried, and you wouldn't have been able to let go. You did the right thing, sweetheart. And it was your choice."

Her words reassure me. "I'm going to go inside now. Shannon... if you think I don't love you or that I don't approve of your choice, you're wrong. You always make the right choice, and you chose the right option for your situation."

She climbs down, and goes inside. Josh comes out a few minutes later, running over to me. "Why do you keep running off, Shannon? I can't keep tabs on you."

I remain silent. "Shannon? Come on, what did I do?"

I stare at him, then my eyes drift away. "I don't think I can marry you, Joshua. You're perfect."

"I am not."

"Really. My family has just fallen in love with the man who violated their little princess. That is perfection, Josh."

"Shan! I am full of faults. C'mon, you aren't serious," he shouts from the bottom of the tree.

I begin to brew my storm of upset.

Josh continues. "Of course you aren't. You already said yes and--"

The storm broke. "Joshua, when I decide what I want, I will tell you. But you're so perfect, maybe if I'm lucky, you can make the decision for me!"

I climb down the ladder and try to leave the backyard. Josh is too quick for me. "You're going to tell me what's wrong, or I'm going to pin you down and not let you up until Passover," he growls, grabbing my arms.

He firmly sits us both down on the ground. "Now, what is wrong? Are you mad at me? What is going on in that brain of yours?"

I begin to tremble with sobs, as I bury my head in his chest, smelling his musky scent. "I was so scared about everything and I was afraid everyone would be upset and no one would talk to me and Grandmother would kill me and Uncle Bill would kill *you*--"

Josh is laughing. "No wonder you're so upset. I would be too if all that was brewing in my brain."

I attempt a smile back as we head inside. I whisper to him, "I want to marry you. Do you accept?" He nods, and smiles.

"I do," he whispers back.

Josh puts our coats away as I sit down at the table. No one really notices my absence except for a few people. Aunt Ally leaned over Mom and whispered to me, "Did you clear your head, Shannie?" I nod in response, and she turns back to her conversation to Uncle Bill about the Senators.

Kelly looks at me from across the table. She leans towards me, and smiles. "What in the world did you two do out there?" I smile back. "We argued." Kelly chuckles, and sits back.

Josh comes swooping in, and seats himself next to me. I wonder what he is thinking. "What are you thinking?" I ask.

He leans into my face. "How I got so lucky to be here with you."

"Hey, you two! None of that at the dinner table!" Aunt Tara admonished. I smile briefly at her, but don't pull away from Josh.

"So when are you going to get married?" Grandmother looked straight into my eyes.

I glanced at Josh. "Actually, we aren't sure, Grandmother. We might not, and just live in sin." Her expression was priceless, as the rest of my family broke into chuckles.

Uncle Bill looked over at me. "I believe your grandmother was serious, young lady, and you should speak to her with respect--"

"Oh, shut up, Bill. Mom was out of line asking a nineteen year old

when she's getting married," Mom retorted. My family then burst out with voices, everyone arguing. Aunt Sam leaned over to me, and whispered, "Feel like sneaking out?"

I nodded. "C'mon then," she murmured. She slipped out quietly.

I looked at the table, and everyone arguing. I whispered to Josh where I was going, and he nodded. He sat back in his chair with a big smile on his face. I knew what he was thinking: that this was a lot more fun than a Passover Seder dinner at the Petermans'.

I snuck out to the porch, where Aunt Sam was smoking a cigar. "Hey, you want a drag?" she asked.

"No, I'm trying to quit," I answered quietly. She laughed. "That's what I love about you, kid. You're sense of humor is more Mulder than Scully."

"Thank you, I think." I sat down on the porch swing, and Aunt Sam sat next to me.

"I guess this is too late, but I'm going to tell you anyway, Shannon. You're too damn young to be making these decisions, like *abortions*. You're so young, and Shan, believe me, if you didn't want to tell your mom, I can understand that. But I would've helped you out," she offers sincerely.

"I know, Aunt Sam. But I felt I should do this by myself--"

"And Josh, honey? What did he say?" I look at the floor.

"He... um... He wanted to keep the baby. I told him no, and we...."

"What?" she asks.

"We argued for about a week. Then I realized it was stupid, and I told him that, so we made up, and that was that. He took me to an abortion clinic the next morning."

A great sadness washed over me. "That was the most horrible thing that ever happened to me, Aunt Sam. I never will feel the same again. Everyday is the same. Mundane, quiet. All of my friends tiptoe around me, whispering, treating me like a delicate flower. It's horrible. I hate it!" I bury my face into her shoulder, and for the trillionth time today, I sob.

"I did too," she whispers. I pull away. "What?"

"When I was twenty, I fell in love. Actually, with your uncle. David was-- a lot like Josh, sort of. Anyway, we messed around too much one night, and I got pregnant. Daddy... freaked out completely. He was so furious, sweetheart. He was so very angry, I thought he was going to kill me, literally. But he just told me to do something about it. So I went and had an abortion. When Dad found out, he was livid. Apparently, he had a change of heart and wanted me to keep the baby. It was like I couldn't please him. Eventually he forgave me, but to this day, I don't know if I forgive him for what he put me through."

This great admittance to me is not unusual. She has told me things, but never this deep. "You know, I think this is the first story I've heard about Grandfath--"

She gives me a grave look. "Not Grandfather. My father." I look at her with wonder.

"But I thought--" She shook her head. "I don't want to go into details. But let's just say, Grandfather Mulder and my father are different people." I nod, not wanting to know anymore.

Aunt Sam got up, yanking her jacket closed. "I'll see you inside, okay? It's too chilly out here for me." She gives me a smile, and walks into the house.

I sit back and sigh. This life I'm living is starting to suck. Not a lot, hell, I'm an engaged woman. But I'm also nineteen. I'm too young to be married. I cannot believe what Aunt Sam just told me. That's so heavy.

I go inside because I'm starting to freeze my ass off. Not because I want to be with my family. And besides, you can only debate Neruda in your mind for so long.

Everyone is sitting around the Christmas tree opening gifts. I walk over to sit next to Sam, and he looks up at me.

"Hey, Shannie. Aunt Sam got me a parachute!"

I smile at him and ruffle his hair.

Uncle Charlie calls over to me, "Shannon, come over here. I have to give you your gift."

I sit down next to him on the couch and he hands me a box. I open it.....and inside is a small football jersey. Small like baby sized.

"For your baby, when the time is right," he whispers to me. I give him a big hug and smile.

"Thank you," I whisper. I pull out his present, tickets to see the Celtics. "You and Aunt Ally can come stay with me and Josh." He whooped, and went to go find my aunt. I stare down at the jersey. Patriots.

It is now dark. Everybody's ready to go home, so I escape to my car pretty quickly. Dad comes up to my window. "Are you leaving so soon, honey? Aren't you going to ride with Josh?"

I fake a yawn, and shake my head, no. "I'm really tired. Just--tell him I said goodbye. Okay?"

Dad leans in and kisses me. "Okay. I'll see you when we get home."

I pull out of the driveway and onto Grandma's street. As I start down the road, the happy Christmas lights glow and show that family is the best thing in the world. Well, fuck that idea.

I flip on the radio at a stoplight. Ben Folds Five comes on. I heard them perform at school, and they are so intense.

"Now that I have found someone I'm feeling more alone Than I ever have before She is a brick and I'm drowning slowly Off the coast and I'm headed nowhere She is a brick and I'm drowning slowly..."

I wipe my eyes, and stare out at the highway. A lot of exhausted families are heading home from a day at Grandma's. A lot of tired parents. A lot kids asleep in backseats.

"Can't you see It's not me your dying for Now she's feeling more alone Than she ever has before..."

I smack off the radio, and wipe my eyes again.

My family, right now, is falling in love with my soon to be husband, who I'm not sure I want to marry. I'm in my car. Alone.

And my family is weird.

END

End
file.